

LOCALIZED MOTION TRIGGERS YOUR INSTINCTS

By Kent DuFault



https://unsplash.com/photos/xj_HFnpg0w

Armen Aydinyan – No EXIF

Do you really know what a focal point is?

A focal point is a location within the framework of a photo that attracts immediate attention. Sometimes, a focal point is the subject of the picture, and sometimes a focal point supports the subject of a photograph by drawing close attention in the direction of the subject.

These triggers for immediate attention aren't magic. Instead, they simply play off the instincts that are buried in the human mind. I call them tribal instincts because that's how they formed-back in the day, when noticing something quickly could be a life-or-death matter.

In the first Creativity Prompt, we talked about color contrast. Tribal instinct has honed our reflexes to 'notice' odd colors and shapes in our surrounding environment.

Another uber effective focal point is called localized motion.

Have you ever noticed movement out of the corner of your eye and then jerked your

head in that direction to see what it was? Yes, localized motion is potent, especially in photography as a focal point!

Consider This: Look at the opening photo of this Creativity Prompt. Even though the girl on the right is not **actively** moving- her bent posture **alludes** to the act of motion. Think about this same photo if the girl on the left was simply standing next to the other girl. They would become lost in an unorganized composition. Instead, that **implied motion** is a focal point that pulls the eyes to both girls first and then ultimately toward the woman on the left.



Assignment:

Photograph your family and friends with implied movement. Organize your composition around that implied motion- make it real, believable, and personal (just like the example photo).



<https://unsplash.com/photos/1PXTQIbJQYE>

<https://unsplash.com/photos/zy6GTHwpDzk>

Mark Basarab – Photos left and right - No EXIF

These two shots are a fantastic illustration of how localized motion used as a focal point vastly improved one picture over the other.

The shot on the right pulls the eyes immediately toward the couple due to the movement between them.

I'm not saying that the shot on the left is terrible; it's merely not as effective to get the eyes toward the couple. And let's face it, they are the subject.

Important: What this above point means to you as a photographer, is that you must give thought to your use of a focal point within the overall framework of your scene. Let me show you an example.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/1PXTQIbJQYE>

Mark Basarab – No EXIF

This cropped version (of the left photo on page 2) maintains the same mood and story as the original. But by reorganizing the composition, an easily visible localized motion focal point has been created. The man's hand touching her arm in localized motion has been awarded more visual strength by bringing the couple forward within the framework of the overall scene.



Assignment:

Using friends and family as models, set up a portrait scenario. Keep these sample photos in your mind. Your chosen scene doesn't have to be exotic but perhaps offering varied opportunities. Use localized motion as a focal point. Concentrate on how that focal point is working within the framework of your shot. Try **not** to crop (as I had to in the left example image to improve the focal point).



<https://unsplash.com/photos/wDOeiVmERPI>

Grant Ritchie - No EXIF

Localized motion doesn't need to be large within the frame to carry immediate attention.

When planning the use of motion as a focal point, consider the surroundings. Does the focal point jump from the scene (see above image)? This shot clearly demonstrates the point. Would it be as effective if the person were simply standing there?



Assignment:

Shoot a variety of pictures using motion as the focal point. Vary the size of the focal point from very large to very small within the frame. Work with other composition tools to make your focal point work. (For example, the road as a leading line to the jumping person, which is the focal point of the subject-the landscape.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/kQroAiSQRtg>

Matt Artz - Coolpix S210, 17.3mm lens, f/5.7, 1/190th, ISO 64

Here are some questions for you.

In the photo above, is the motion of the bird a focal point? Is the bird the subject?

I would argue that the intent here was for the bird to be the subject with no thought process given to a focal point. If anything, I would call out the bird's feet as a focal point due to their strong shape and tonal contrast to the sky. Therefore, I would label the feet as the focal point. I guess the bird is the subject, but technically and aesthetically, this shot kind of fails.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/YPwu2-aBMqk>

Joshua J. Cotton - Canon EOS 7D, 600mm lens, f/7.1, 1/1250th, ISO 400

When you look at this shot- what is the first thing that you notice?

It's the raised leg, isn't it? That leg is implied localized movement, even though it is completely sharp and in focus and not currently in motion.

Isn't photography fun! So much to consider.



Assignment:

Photograph some pets, animals, or birds in the wild or at the zoo. Concentrate on capturing their actual movement or their implied movement to create a focal point that supports the particular animal as the subject. Keep these two example photos in mind. Remember, localized motion doesn't necessarily have to be indicated through motion blur!



<https://unsplash.com/photos/d9tEXpDdh8>

Chris Fuller - Sony ILCE-7M2, 50mm lens, f/1.8, 1/1600th, ISO 50

What is the subject of this photo?
Unfortunately, it's kind of hard to tell.

There is a critical two-step process at the opening moments of composing a photo.

1 What is your subject? What are you trying to show the viewer?

2 Is your focal point the subject? If that's your intent, does it carry enough visual weight to be the subject? If it isn't the subject, does it stand out enough to clearly state what the subject is within the frame?



<https://unsplash.com/photos/d9tEXpDbh8>

Chris Fuller - Sony ILCE-7M2, 50mm lens, f/1.8, 1/1600th, ISO 50 and post-processing by Kent DuFault

By completing a simple post-processing procedure of cropping the original, I have completely changed all of the components of this photo. It is now much more easily understood.

- 1 The dancing couple is the subject.
- 2 The localized motion is a focal point.
- 3 The cityscape is a storytelling background.

Can you have more than one focal point in a photograph? Absolutely!



<https://unsplash.com/photos/kPIAoEyI7LM>

Nate Johnston - Canon EOS 5D Mark III, 24mm lens, f/4, 1/320th, ISO 500

I like to think of focal points as a set of weights. You have a one-pound weight, a two-pound, a five-pound, a ten-pound weight, and et cetera.

When organizing your focal points, you want to compose so that the eyes move from the least amount of weight to the greatest amount of weight. But, of course, by that time, the eyes should be on the subject.

This example photo depicts this concept perfectly, and in this case, localized motion trumps the sunset focal point.

When you look at this picture, your eyes immediately go to the sunset behind the couple. It is a pretty strong focal point due to brightness, contrast, and proximity.

However, the eyes don't linger there for long. Instead, they move to the couple and become stationary. Why? The kiss!

The kiss is a localized motion focal point. It also adds mood and story.

The kiss overpowers the sunset as the focal point with the most weight!



Assignment:

Create a portfolio of work where you use multiple focal points. Concentrate on the idea of varying visual weight. Strive to place your numerous focal points so that they create a path of stepping stones right toward the subject.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

Fujifilm Finepix X100, 23mm lens, f/5.6, 1/350th, ISO 400

I would like to close this prompt with this photograph that I took several years ago at a state fair ride.

The woman's expression and body language create implied motion. It serves as a focal point to the subject, which is her entire being. Thus, the story is relevant to her location.

Her expression is implied localized motion.

Keep that in mind as you take photographs. One second, either way of releasing the shutter on your camera could make or break your attempt at a picture.

Expression is a potent localized movement focal point!